

NC-124

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Preliminary Inventory of the Records
of the
American Commission for the Protection
and Salvage of Artistic and Historic
Monuments in War Areas

(Record Group 239)

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

R.G. 239, Records of the American Commission
for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic
and Historic Monuments in War Areas

Civil
Inventory: NC-124 (Aug. 1965)

Security-classified correspondence, memorandums, and reports
including numerous field investigation, interrogation, and
special reports on people, places, and property prepared
by OSS's Art Looting Investigation Unit.

1943-46
44 cu.ft.
75% classified

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe was announced by the Secretary of State on August 20, 1943. It was created to protect and conserve works of art, artistic and historic monuments, and valuable records in Europe, as well as to salvage and to restore to their lawful owners objects seized by the Axis Powers or their agents. In 1944 the Commission was renamed the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas.

The President recognized the need for such an organization operating under the auspices of the Government; and on June 23, 1943, he approved a plan submitted by the Secretary of State. This plan was suggested by leaders in the fields of art, archeology, and architecture and in particular by two private groups, the American Defense-Harvard Group and the Committee on the Protection of Cultural Treasures in War Areas, a committee of the American Council of Learned Societies. Under this plan the following functions were assigned to the Commission:

During the war.--(1) To work with the appropriate branch of the United States Army, for the purpose of furnishing information to the General Staff of the Army, museum officials, and art historians so that, so far as was consistent with military necessity, works of cultural value could be protected in countries occupied by armies of the United Nations. (2) To compile, through the assistance of refugee librarians and historians of art, lists of property appropriated by the Axis invading forces, by representatives of Axis governments, and by private citizens of Axis countries.

At the time of the armistice.--(1) To urge that the armistice terms include the restitution of public property appropriated by the Axis Powers. When it was not possible to restore such property, either because it had been destroyed or could not be found, restitution in kind was to be made by the Axis Powers to the countries from which the property had been taken. In such cases, the Commission recommended a list of equivalent works of art or historic documents that should be transferred to the invaded countries from Axis museums or from the private collections of Axis leaders. (2) To urge that restitution be made of private property appropriated by the Axis nations.

The members of the Commission, who were appointed by the President, were as follows: Owen J. Roberts, Associate Justice of the Supreme

Court of the United States, Chairman; David E. Finley, Director of the National Gallery of Art, Vice Chairman; Huntington Cairns, Secretary-Treasurer of the Gallery, Secretary-Treasurer; Herbert Lehman, Director of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations; Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress; William Bell Dinsmoor, President of the Archaeological Institute of America; Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York and President of the Association of Art Museum Directors; and Paul J. Sachs, Associate Director of the Fogg Museum of Fine Arts of Harvard University. All members were appointed for 3-year terms and they served without compensation.

The Commission's main work throughout its 3 years of existence consisted of advising the Civil Affairs Division of the War Department on the establishment of a Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Program; providing maps and handbooks for that Division; recommending persons to serve as Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Officers; and receiving reports on the location, ownership, and condition of cultural treasures and making that information available to other Government agencies and to scholars. The Commission spent much time in the investigation of art looting and in aiding in the restitution of looted material. These activities involved cooperation with analogous British and Allied organizations and with the State and Treasury Departments, the Office of Strategic Services, the Office of Censorship, and the Foreign Economic Administration. It had committees on Definition of Works of Cultural Value and Property; Administration; Books, Manuscripts, and Other Printed and Written Material of Cultural Value; Collection of Maps, Information, and Description of Art Objects; Personnel; Art Instruction in Military Government Schools; and Axis-Appropriated Property. The work of the Commission was highly centralized, however, and among its records only a few folders are identified with the work of the committees.

The American Defense-Harvard Group and the Committee on the Protection of Cultural Treasures in War Areas continued to assist the Commission. The former prepared lists of monuments meriting protection and a manual on protective measures and aided the Commission in the selection of competent personnel to work in the field. The latter prepared lists of cultural treasures and maps showing their locations and financed the arrangement of a collection of photographs showing cultural monuments and war damage. It also gave its research data and working materials to the Commission and they were incorporated into the Commission's records.

The Commission and its small staff had offices in the National Gallery of Art. A sum sufficient to meet clerical and other necessary expenses during the first year of the Commission's existence was allocated from the President's emergency fund. Thereafter appropriations were made by Congress to the Commission as an independent executive agency.

The last meeting of the Commission was held on June 20, 1946. Shortly thereafter its records were transferred to the custody of the Archivist. Those functions of the Commission that involved location, recovery, and restoration of cultural treasures, particularly works of art, were taken over by the Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State, and the Commission provided that its business records and so-called special files, which included histories of the relations of the Commission with agencies of the United States and with foreign agencies, should be charged by the National Archives to the Department of State for the Department's use as long as it required them.

A complete account of the background, organization, and activities of the Commission may be found in its Report (Washington, 1946. 237 p.), which includes information on its records and reproductions of a number of the photographs that it collected.

The records described in this inventory are those of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas that were in the National Archives on August 16, 1965. They amount to 38 cubic feet and are designated as Record Group 239.

The entry for cartographic records was supplied by Charlotte M. Ashby.

RECORDS OF THE AMERICAN COMMISSION FOR
THE PROTECTION AND SALVAGE OF
ARTISTIC AND HISTORIC MONUMENTS IN WAR AREAS

Administrative Records

MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION. Aug. 25, 1943-June 20, 1946.
5 in. 1

Copies of the minutes and verbatim transcripts of meetings, with related reports, memoranda, and notices. Arranged chronologically.

GENERAL RECORDS. 1943-46. 2 ft. 2

Chiefly applications and letters of recommendation. Arranged alphabetically by name of applicant.

RECORDS OF PAUL SACHS, COMMISSIONER. 1942-46. 2 ft. 3

Copies of minutes of the Commission and correspondence and memoranda relating to personnel matters.

FISCAL AND ACCOUNTING RECORDS. 1943-47. 5 in. 4

Pay cards, budget reports, statements of balances, summaries of allotment ledger, monthly summaries of status of appropriations, and related correspondence with the General Accounting Office and other Government agencies. Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Preinvasion Research Records

MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS ACCUMULATED BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES. 1943-45. 1 ft. 5

Lists of art personnel, private collections, and cultural objects in Europe, which were compiled from varied sources. Arranged alphabetically by name of country and thereunder by name of city.

PRELIMINARY CARDS PROVIDING INFORMATION FOR HANDBOOKS AND ATLASES. 1943-45. 28 ft. 6

Cards (4" x 6") containing data on cultural treasures and indicating their locations, their character, and the officials in charge. Several subseries relate to such classes of treasures as archives and private collections. Arranged alphabetically by name of country and thereunder by name of city.

HANDBOOKS ON CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. 1943-45. 2 ft. 7

Handbooks, prepared for the use of the Army Service Forces, containing lists of and information concerning museums, monuments, libraries, archival establishments, and other cultural institutions

of European countries. Included are miscellaneous lists, drafts, abstracts from reference works, and notes used in the preparation of the handbooks.

QUESTIONNAIRES SUBMITTED BY EXPERTS. 1943-45. 2 in. 8

Printed forms used by the American Council of Learned Societies and filled in by scholars, indicating their knowledge of cultural treasures in various regions abroad and giving information on their travels and their private collections of research data. These forms were used to locate sources of information for the preparation of maps and handbooks (see entry 9).

GENERAL CARTOGRAPHIC RECORDS. 1943-46. 1 ft. 1,489 items. 9

During World War II a major activity of the Commission was the compilation of maps showing locations of areas or sites in enemy or enemy-occupied areas that were to be spared destruction, if possible. Base maps of provinces, regions, and sites were acquired; and tissue overlays were made on which numbers were placed indicating these areas or sites. Photocopies were then made of the base maps and accompanying overlays. Lists identifying each site or area shown were typed. The records consist of a set of instructions for the preparation of maps, lists of maps prepared, and a set of these photoprocessed maps and accompanying identification lists. In a few instances a base map with a manuscript overlay substitutes for a photocopy. The countries for which there are records are as follows: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Corsica, Czechoslovakia, Dalmatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Indochina, Italy, Japan, Java, Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippine Islands, Rumania, Sardinia, Sicily, and Yugoslavia. Arranged by continent, thereunder alphabetically by name of country, and thereunder alphabetically by name of city or province.